

Amphibious Assault Ship Replacement



The amphibious fleet is organized for forward presence and includes 11 Amphibious Ready Groups (ARGs)—each comprising three amphibious ships—which, in turn, can comprise Expeditionary Strike Groups. The centerpiece of the ARG is a *Wasp*-class or *Tarawa*-class amphibious assault ship. The four ships of the *Tarawa*-class general-purpose amphibious assault ships reach the end of their expected service lives between 2011 and 2015. The LHD 8 will replace one of the LHAs, leaving the LHA Replacement Program—LHA(R)—to replace the last four *Tarawa*-class LHAs.

In March 2001, the Navy and Joint Staff approved and validated the LHA(R) Mission Need Statement. The Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics authorized Milestone “A” Acquisition status for the program, as well as its entry into the Concept Exploration phase, in July 2001. Under Department of Defense (DoD) guidance, the Navy conducted an analysis of alternatives (AoA) study to determine the best method of replacing the four remaining LHAs. This study, completed in

the summer 2002, evaluated the following alternatives:

- A repeat LHD 8 with evolutionary modifications
- The LHD Plug Plus (an LHD 8 modified to be 77 feet longer and 10 feet wider), upgraded to enhance its ability to operate the larger and more capable new-generation amphibious systems
- New ship designs spanning a wide range of size and capability.

Navy and Marine Corps leadership determined that a modified design based on the LHD hull would be the most suitable choice based on cost, capability, and schedule. In order to meet future warfighting requirements and fully capitalize on the investment in MV-22s and Joint Strike Fighters, ships with enhanced aviation capabilities will replace the remaining LHA ships. These ships will provide increased jet fuel storage and aviation ordnance magazines, and enhanced hanger and maintenance spaces to support aviation maintenance. The design will then spiral to include additional capabilities not originally included on the first LHA(R). The first ship is currently scheduled for a FY 2007 contract award and a FY 2013 delivery, acquiring the following ships in the class every three years. This extended procurement and construction schedule will retire the *Tarawa*-class LHA in 2022, seven years past its 35-year expected service life.